

# BEYOND BORDERS



*A ministry created by EAPE, founded by Tony Campolo*

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Dear friends,

Last week after we had finished pulling together the newsletter you have just received, I was sitting in front of my computer, catching up on news from Haiti online, and enjoying a sandwich I'd picked up for lunch at a bakery down the street. Most of the stories on the Haitian Press Agency web site were about Haiti's current political impasse. I skipped over many of the stories, but one headline from October 24 caught my attention.

## **Pregnant Woman Dies after Being Refused Admission to Hospital**

Why, I wondered, would a hospital refuse a pregnant woman treatment? I read on and recognized the hospital, the Citimed clinic in Pétion-Ville, a small private clinic that I had taken a Haitian friend to for stitches back when I was still living in Haiti. Although not a fancy hospital, it was better equipped than most clinics in Haiti. They certainly could have helped this woman who was experiencing eclampsia, a common ailment of poor pregnant women in Haiti that strikes before or during delivery and, if untreated, leads to convulsions and the death of both the mother and her baby.

The article was only five sentences long and didn't even name the woman who died. Her death probably wouldn't have generated any news at all if the police hadn't been called in to break up the disturbance caused by the dead woman's extended family. They were upset because the hospital had refused to admit her because she was short 100 gourdes for the admission fee.

I pull out my calculator. One hundred gourdes at the current exchange rate comes to \$2.32. I stop chewing. I had just spent more than twice this amount for my sandwich. I think of this woman and her baby. I imagine her family pounding on the hospital gate, screaming, wailing, angry that their daughter, their sister, their cousin, was dying in the street. I think about this demented world that in its calculus values the half sandwich I hold in my left hand more than the life of this woman and her baby.

Our fall newsletter's theme is "Transformation." This woman's death is yet another shocking testimony that our world is in desperate need of transformation. Her death was not some freak accident or anomaly. According to the United Nations, one in seventeen Haitian women dies due to pregnancy or child birth (compared to only one in 4,085 women in the industrialized world). The only thing remarkable about this woman's death is that it got reported at all. Every minute of every day a woman dies of pregnancy or childbirth, and over 99 percent of these deaths take place in the poor developing world.

Why are all these poor women dying in the basic act of giving life? Lack of access to adequate medical care is the short answer. But there are less direct and less obvious causes, too. According to UNICEF, "Women continue to die during pregnancy and childbirth mainly because of low social status and powerlessness. This limits their access to basic education and

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basic healthcare. Without basic education, women may remain illiterate and dependent on others for health information. Their ability to pursue information that would empower them to make the best decisions on childbearing, health and nutrition remains compromised.”

([www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr07iwd.htm](http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr07iwd.htm))

Deep down, though, this problem, like so many others plaguing our world, is rooted in inequality. God made the world with enough for us all to have what we need, but not enough for our greed. The disparity between the wealthiest and poorest in our world has never been greater than today. The most privileged 20% of the population controls 86% of the world's wealth, while the poorest 20% have to survive with access to only about 1% of that wealth.

And behind all these cold numbers are real people, real tragedies, few of which ever make the headlines. This woman and her baby's dying outside the gates of a hospital is not some aberration. It is a snapshot of the *status quo*, of the way our world really is.

It is also a snapshot of my heart. I can tell myself that if I had been there, it would have been different. If I had been the hospital administrator, I would have made an exception to the rules for this woman. If I had been there I would have gladly paid for this woman to be admitted. But, it is no use. I know that in a very real way, I *was* there. I was there to the extent that I have willingly accepted the privileges and perks of a global economic order that protects the excesses of a few but neglects the most basic needs of the poor. I was there to the degree I've allowed my heart to be unmoved by the suffering of those excluded by the world.

Maybe I can't transform the world on my own. But the condition of the world reflects the condition of the human heart, of my heart. By God's grace, there is something I can do about the hardness of my own heart.

Throughout the scriptures we are called to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. I wasn't there when this woman died, but if my heart is transformed by love, I will join her family in their grief, in their outrage, in the effort to disturb the *status quo* that locks the poor out and values the life of the destitute less than the half sandwich I hold in my hand. The extent of my heart's transformation will be measured by my willingness to give up the comforts and excesses my privilege affords me and to stand outside the walls of this world with the excluded, demanding that the gates be opened to every life.

As we prepare for Thanksgiving this year, let us show God our gratitude for the blessings we have by sharing them more freely. And as we face the Christmas marketing blitz, let us celebrate the gift of Christ's birth by showing our solidarity with all mothers and babies who find no room in our world.

Thanks so much for all you share!



David Diggs,  
Co-director